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ABSTRACT

Sixty-six Nigerian and 120 U.S. rural children and adolescents (ages 6-18) from three social classes were interviewed about their conceptions of economic inequality. The rich and poor were described referring to central (traits, thoughts) and sociocentric (class consciousness, life chances) characteristics. Age was a factor in change of type of response given. Differences between rich and poor were increasingly described by U.S. children using central responses while inconsistency of response was evident among Nigerians. Nigerians described similarities less diversely than those in the United States. Diverse responses were given to explain inequalities in wealth. Nigerians and older U.S. students emphasized personal effort as a means to upward social mobility. Younger U.S. subjects used definitional criteria to justify wealth while older subjects gave diverse responses. Nigerians tended to justify wealth on the basis of personal effort. Findings were interpreted in terms of cognitive developmental, functionalist, and conflict theories. Tentative curriculum implications are presented. (A discussion of the responses to 12 questions asked the students are given. A bibliography of 29 sources is included.) (Author/PPB)

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CHILDREN'S CONCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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SO 019 994

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Abstract

Nigerian and American rural children and adolescents (ages 6-18) from three social classes were interviewed about their conceptions of economic inequality. The rich and poor were described referring to central (traits, thoughts) and sociocentric (class consciousness, life chances) characteristics. Age was a factor in change of type of response given. Differences between rich and poor were increasingly described by Americans using central responses while inconsistency of response was evident among Nigerians. Nigerians described similarities less diversely than Americans. Diverse responses were given to explain inequalities in wealth. Nigerians and older American students emphasized personal effort as a means to upward social mobility. Younger American subjects used definitional criteria to justify wealth while older subjects gave diverse responses. Nigerians tended to justify wealth on the basis of personal effort. Findings were interpreted in terms of cognitive developmental, functionalist, and conflict theories. Tentative curriculum implications were presented.

Children's Conceptions of Economic Inequality in Nigeria and the United States

The social class system incorporates and reflects economic inequalities. Educators present the social class system to students and help them to explore, understand, and develop their personal role in relation to it. Effects of the social class system on individuals have been widely discussed from different theoretical perspectives (Deutsch, Katz, Jensen, 1968; Jencks, 1972, Marx, 1844/1966; Parsons, 1960, Weber, 1946). How individuals come to conceptualize social class systems has not been widely investigated. The criteria people use in placing others into classes or their knowledge of which occupations or possessions are associated with different social classes have been the focus of most research (Centers, 1949; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1971; Tudor, 1971). This focus on criteria and knowledge gives limited insight into the rationale built to justify economic inequalities in society.

In order to understand how the conception of economic inequality develops it is necessary to explore children's and adolescent's descriptions and comparisons of rich and poor people, and their explanations, justifications and concepts of social mobility and change. Leahy has investigated the development of conceptions of economic inequality through examining these factors among children and adolescents living in metropolitan areas along the eastern seaboard (1981, 1983). The purpose of this study was to extend Leahy's investigation to rural children and adolescents in the United States and in Nigeria. Rural children are less isolated by socioeconomic class than are metropolitan children. They are likely to attend consolidated schools where children of all classes attend. All classes obtain goods from the same sources and have the same religious and recreational facilities available. Because large populations do not exist classes are not likely to be stratified by living area, shopping areas, and other characteristics. This study investigated the development of the conception of economic inequality among rural children because the social situation in rural areas does differ from the social situation in metropolitan areas and may result in differing patterns of development of this concept.

In analyzing metropolitan children and adolescent's descriptions and comparisons of rich and poor people, Leahy (1981) categorized their responses of person description by whether they were peripheral (referring to possessions, appearances, and behaviors), central (referring to traits and thoughts), or sociocentric (referring to life chances

and class consciousness). Adolescents emphasized central and sociocentric categories more than younger children who emphasized peripheral characteristics in their descriptions. In describing the rich and poor life chances and thoughts were mentioned more frequently by lower- and working-class subjects than upper-middle-class subjects. The traits of the poor were most likely to be mentioned by upper-middle-class subjects.

Leahy (1983) also reported an age effect where adolescents were more likely than children to explain and justify inequality by referring to equity and were more fatalistic in their conceptions of change and in justifying wealth and poverty. Younger children were more likely than adolescents to claim that individual mobility and social change could be achieved through others giving money to poor individuals and less likely to say that social change could be achieved by changing the social structure. Upper-middle-class subjects were more likely than others to claim that poverty cannot be changed and that poverty is due to equity or wasting money and less likely than lower-class subjects to claim that the poor should not suffer. Lower class 17-year-olds were more likely than any other group to claim that the rich would resist social change.

Most earlier research focused on either the development of knowledge of or affective allegiance to social institutions (Jahoda, 1959; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1971; Tudor, 1971; Hess & Torney, 1967). This body of research has indicated that allegiance to the value of social institutions increases throughout childhood and adolescence (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Greenstein, 1965; Hess & Torney, 1967).

Leahy's (1983) work indicated the existence of cognitive developmental trends in conceptualizations of social structure. Piaget (1932) proposed that between the ages of 6 and 11 years, there is a change from authority to equality to equity based conceptions of justice. Others have shown mixed findings as to whether equity gains precedence over equality between the ages of 6 and 11 years (Hook, 1978; Hook & Cook, 1979; Lane & Coon, 1972; Lerner, 1974; Leventhal & Lane, 1970; Furby, 1979).

Sociocentric conceptions of social structure are reflected in explanations of economic inequality that refer to the nature of the economic or political system. Conceptions of social change that are sociocentric might also refer to changing the economic or political system as opposed to focusing on the characteristics (such as effort or intelligence) of the individuals making up different economic classes. Leahy (1981, 1983) explored whether there was an increasing emphasis on conceptions of social structure with increasing age. He found that younger

children were less likely to say social change could be achieved by changing the social structure.

Consensus and conflict theories are also important in regard to development of an understanding of social structure and economic inequality. Functionalist theory is a theory of consensus. It argues that there is a wide consensus as to the nature of the system which stratifies people into classes. This consensus stabilizes social institutions through socializing members of the society to a shared ideology justifying unequal distribution of social goods (Merton, 1957; Parsons, 1960). Functionalist theory also suggests that increasing age results in the socialization of the child and in the internalization of the social consensus. Increasing age, therefore, is associated with an increasing justification of inequality. Confict, or dialectical theory, on the other hand, states that conflict will occur in interpretations of social reality. Differing interpretations result from the system which stratifies people into different classes (Marx, 1844/1966; Weber, 1946).

Each theory, consensus and conflict, predicts the development of different and contrasting conceptions of economic inequalities. First, consensus or functionalist theory predicts a general lack of conflict as most members of society share a similar conception of economic inequality. Conflict theory predicts obvious class and race differences in the conception of economic class. Increasing age might, therefore, be associated with incrasing class and race differences as children gain social experience and become aware of competing interests between races and classes. Second, functionalist theory appears to suggest that the shared conceptions of inequality generally should emphasize the legitimacy of class differences. Therefore economic class differences would be explained and justified by equity resulting from the amount of work expended or from other factors. Differences would not be challenged.

This study considered the following questions, each of which was related to Leahy's work (1981, 1983). The research questions focused on two areas; first, descriptions and comparisons of the rich and the poor and second, explanations and justifications of economic inequality. The research questions also considered the effectiveness of explanations of the development of the concept of economic inequality as theorized by cognitive developmental, consensus and conflict theories.

1. Can trends be identified in the definition of classes of persons in terms of peripheral or central characteristics?
2. Is there developmental change in the recognition that social class entails more than the characteristics of individual members of groups?

3. Are there age differences in the recognition of differences and similarities between rich and poor people?
4. Do age trends exist in the use of equity concepts in explaining and justifying economic inequality?
5. Is there an increasing emphasis on conceptions of social structure with increasing age?

Method

Subjects

Two sets of subjects were involved in the study. The first set of subjects were 120 randomly chosen children and adolescents living in rural areas in a south central state in the United States (Table 1). Among the subjects 118 were Caucasian and 2 black, an accurate reflection of the demography of the areas in which the children resided where there were very few non-Caucasian children. Because of their small number, the black subjects were dropped from the final analysis of the study reducing the number of subjects to 118. The subjects lived in areas where the primary occupation was farming although some children's parents were employed in service occupations or by local government. They included 57 boys and 57 girls. The age groups were as follows: ages 6-8, 14; ages 9-12, 28; ages 13-15, 58; and ages 16-18, 14. When identified by socioeconomic class following Edward's (1943) index the numbers in each class were: I. upper-upper-middle class, 4; II. middle class, 23; III. working class, 61; and IV. lower class, 30. This distribution reflected the demography of the counties in which the children resided where there were few class I residents and a majority of working class residents. Because there were so few class I children this group was not utilized in the analysis of the U. S. data resulting in a final sample group of 114 children and adolescents.

The second set of subjects were 66 randomly chosen Nigerian rural students living in a western state with a population representing a mixture of ethnic groups (Table 1). These subjects lived in an area which was primarily agricultural. The children's parents' occupations varied widely from market trader to school principal but parents were mostly engaged in agricultural production. The sample included 39 males and 27 females whose ages were: 6-8, 18; 9-12, 18; 13-15, 12; and 16-18, 18. The students socioeconomic status was identified as: class I, upper-upper-middle, 25; class II, middle, 36; and class III, working, 5. Classes were identified through the use of a social ranking scale which identified father's; occupation, level of schooling, home ownership, ownership of means of transportation (e.g. none, bicycle, motor cycle, Volkswagen, Peugeot, Mercedes), number of wives, and status in local

government (e.g. village chief, council of elders member, ordinary citizen). After class was determined, a panel of judges in Nigeria reviewed the information and confirmed the rankings with 92% agreement. The few students in class III, working class and lack of class IV, lower class students is not unusual. Primary education in Nigeria is essentially free and mandatory, although there are expenses involved in some areas in terms of school uniforms and materials and additional fees. However, a child who is going to school is not contributing to the family's economic survival as much as one who is not attending school. The costs involved in school attendance plus the loss of family income are likely to keep children out of school. The situation is more evident at the secondary school level where costs are much more overall.

Instrument

All subjects were individually interviewed by graduate students who had grown up in the areas from which the subjects were drawn. The interviewers used the questions in Leahy's study (1981, 1983). These were: 1) "Describe rich people." "What are they like?" 2) "Describe poor people." "What are they like?" 3) "How are rich people different from poor people?" 4)"How are rich people the same as poor people?" 5) "Why are some people rich while others are poor?" 6) "Why are some people poor while others are rich?" 7) "Should some people be rich while others are poor?" 8) "Should some people be poor, while others are rich?" 9) "How could a poor person get to be rich someday?" 10) "What would have to happen so that there would be no poor people?" 11) "How could you get rich someday?" An additional question was also asked, 12) "Are you rich or poor?"

Interviewers worked with five children and adolescents in practice interviews which were taped and discussed. Interviews with the study's subjects were also tape recorded and transcriptions made. Interviewers were restricted to using the above questions and nonleading probes. Nigerian students were interviewed in their native language. The interview was audiotaped then transcribed into English. Graduate students scored the interviews. They scored three practice interviews and discussed the results. Interrater reliability coefficients of .87 to .96 were achieved on the study interviews.

Content Analysis

Leahy's (1981,1983) categories were utilized although the interviews were also examined for other possible categories. No other categories appeared with enough frequency (more than 4% of the responses) to be added to the content analysis. The content analysis for responses to

each of the questions reflected both psychological and sociological or political conceptions of economic inequality. Peripheral, central and sociocentric descriptions and conceptions of class were scored. Explanations of wealth and poverty were scored using several categories (luck, motivation, and ability) derived from attribution theory (Weiner, 1972). Other categories of explanations referring to occupation, education, social structure, investments and savings, and race, reflected sociological snd political theories of class (Krauss, 1976). An equity conception category was also used where equity was broadly defined as a belief that rewards are contingent on output or behavior.

Political conceptions of inequality, such as justifying inequality by reference to maintaining a political-economic system or challenging inequality because of alienation or class conflicts, were infrequent, 4% or less, at any age. Few subjects responded to a question with "I don't know". All questions except numbers 5 and 9 usually received a response which attempted to answer the question. Some conceptions appearing frequently enough (4%) in Leahy's content analysis did not appear as frequently in this study. One conception rarely used (less than 4%) was violating the law. The subjects did not view violating the law as a rationale for wealth or poverty or as a means to become rich. Another response rarely given involved "having the right connections" (less than 3%). Subjects rarely were fatalistic in their responses (less than 3.5%) nor did they deny that people's situations could be changed (less than 3.5%). Finally, the review of the interviews indicated that several conceptions were frequently used, for example, descriptions of the rich and the poor identifying them by their possessions and traits, explanations of why rich and poor differ by referring to their possessions, of why they are the same by referring to their behaviors and mentioning that they are both people, and mentioning work as a reason why people are rich or poor and how the poor and oneself could become rich. These categories are included in the final content analysis. The content analysis allowed for the categorization of 82 to 98% of all responses.

After content analysis was completed, statistical analysis occurred using frequency counts, percentages, and analyses of variance followed by separate Scheffe comparisons. In all analyses reported here, the dependent measure was the percentage of responses given by a subject falling within each category defined by the content analysis. As in Leahy's study (1981, 1983) only effects of p .01 were considered to be of significance. The percentages of responses within each category for each question are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Results

Responses to Questions

1. How would you describe rich people?

Peripheral responses were given with most frequency by both U. S. and Nigerian subjects. Sociocentric responses were given with greater frequency by both groups of subjects than were central responses. Among U. S. subjects the use of peripheral responses showed no significant change with age while the use of central and sociocentric responses increased between ages 6 and 18. Among Nigerian subjects peripheral responses showed a significant increase between ages 16-18 $F(3,64=13.03)$ while sociocentric and central responses showed a nonsignificant increase between ages 16 - 18. References to class consciousness by U. S. subjects increased with age between 6 and 18, $F(3,110=6.67)$ but were few, less than 3% of Nigerian responses. References to life chances were fewer than 4% in both groups. No effects were found with class or sex in either group.

2. How would you describe poor people?

The use of peripheral responses increased between ages 6 to 12 among U. S. subjects while it decreased with age among Nigerian subjects particularly in reference to the appearances and lack of possessions of the poor. The use of central responses continued to increase through age 18 among U. S. subjects and significantly decreased with age among Nigerian subjects $F(3,64=35.28)$ primarily due to a decrease in references to traits of the poor. The increase in central responses among U. S. subjects was primarily due to an increase in references to personal traits $F(3,110=4.02)$ while the increase in peripheral responses was primarily due to an increase in mention of residence $F(3,110=16.11)$. Sociocentric responses were not significantly evident among either group of subjects. References to the motivations of the poor comprised fewer than 3% of all responses among both groups while references to their residences were fewer than 4% among Nigerian subjects.

3. How are rich and poor people different?

Responses related to central characteristics demonstrated an interaction between age and socioeconomic status among U. S. subjects. Lower class children between ages 9 and 15 were more likely to refer to central characteristics, particularly a person's thoughts, $(F3,110=2.44)$ than were other subjects. With all groups reference to thoughts indicated a trend to increase with age and with lower socioeconomic status groups. Reference to the rich and poor differing because of their possessions, a peripheral characteristic, were high among 6 to 12 year

olds, decreasing thereafter but still remaining a frequent response.

No differences were found among Nigerian subjects in responses by age, sex, or socioeconomic class. Possessions and thoughts were mentioned most by all age groups. Appearance and behaviors each represented 4% or less of the responses.

4. How are rich and poor people the same?

No significant trends were found with responses to this question among U. S. subjects. References to appearances and thoughts were found with less than 4% of the responses.

Among Nigerian subjects children, ages 9-18, were more significantly likely to say that rich and poor people are the same because they are both people $F(3,64=5.80)$. Younger children were more likely to deny that there is any similarity between rich and poor people $F(3,54=11.97)$. Subjects at all ages often responded that rich and poor people exhibit the same behaviors. Subjects rarely referred to the possessions, appearances, or thoughts of the rich and poor (under 2% of the responses).

5. Why are some people rich while others are poor?

Amopng U. S. subjects there was a significant interaction effect between age and socioeconomic status in giving a definition as a response to this trend $F(3,110=3.14)$. Children from the lowest class and the oldest children tended to respond to the question with a definition. As socioeconomic status rose there tended to be an increasing use of a definition with age. There was an interaction effect related to referring to a definition in answering this question such that children from middle class and upper class status and older children, ages 12-18 were most likely to give a definition. Children between 6 and 11 years and of lower or working class status did not use definitions as a response. There was an age effect in identifying an inheritance as a reason for being rich with children between 9 and 18 $F(3,110=3.99)$. Less than 4% of responses referred to effort, education, intelligence, or demographics.

The tendency to say "I don't know" decreased significantly with age $F(3,110=4.73)$ with 6-8 year olds giving all the responses of this type. Fifteen percent of the responses did not fit into any identified category and were diverse from each other.

As age increased among Nigerian subjects they were significantly less likely to say that people are rich because of the way they use their money $F(3,64=3.60)$. Work and effort were most often cited as reasons why some people are rich. Significantly fewer subjects were likely to say people were rich because of luck $F(3,64=2.37)$, violating the

law F(3,64=4.14), inheritance F(3,64=2.30), or how they used their money F(3,64=2.23). Children in higher socioeconomic classes were more likely to cite effort as a reason why people are rich F(3,64=3.32).

6. Why are some people poor while others are rich?
Poor people's lack of effort was cited by U. S. subjects as the major reason why they were poor F(3,110=3.21). There was a significant interaction effect F(8,105=2.71) in which effort was cited more frequently as age increased between 6 and 18 years and as socioeconomic status increased. The oldest students from the highest socioeconomic status were most likely to cite lack of effort as a cause for poverty. Upper and working class Nigerian subjects cited lack of effort significantly more frequently than did middle class subjects as a reason for poverty F(3,64=5.91). Among Nigerian subjects luck was not cited often (8%), but when it was, it tended to be cited as socioeconomic status decreased F(3,64=3.48). No effects were found with age among Nigerian students. A lack of effort and less work were the more frequently given responses in both groups. A lack of education was cited by 12% of the Nigerian respondents. Responses comprising less than 4% of the total among both groups were violating the law, not inheriting money, intelligence, and use of money.

7. Should some people be poor while others are rich?
A wide range of responses were given to this question by both groups. No significant differences were found among U. S. subjects in response to this question. There was a nonsignificant tendency for U. S. subjects by socioeconomic status to refer to the consequences to the poor of being poor while others are rich. As socioeconomic status decreased the tendency to refer to consequences of poverty increased. Two responses were found significantly more often among Nigerian students, although these responses did not represent a large proportion (under 15% each). The first response was that some people should be rich because their behavior was such that it merited wealth F(3,64=3.45). The other response was fatalistic, some people will be rich because that is the way of things F(3,64=5.41). Responses referring to a definition comprised less than 4% of the total among U. S. subjects. No Nigerian subject responded that the rich should help the poor and only one described the consequences to the poor of their poverty.

8. Should some people be rich while others are poor?
A definition was given with significant frequency in response to this question F(8,105=2.81) by U. S. subjects and not at all by Nigerian subjects. An interaction effect was found such that a steady drop occurred in use of a

definition byn U. S. subjects with decreasing socioeconomic status and increasing age.

Among Nigerian subjects socioeconomic status effected the response that all people should be equal. As the socioeconomic status increased respondents were significantly more likely to say there should be equality between the classes. A wide range of responses was given here. The most frequently given responses were that all should be equal or that wealth is due those who have it because they have earned it. However, these responses each given 7% or less of the time.

9. How could a poor person get to be rich someday?

Among U. S. subjects asking others for money $F(3,110=5.88)$ was a response which rose from age 6 through 12 and decreased thereafter. Luck tended to be mentioned at all ages and socioeconomic levels but not significantly. The response "I don't know" increased significantly between ages 6 through 12 and then decreased $F(3,110=3.92)$. References to not wanting to be rich, violating the law, and getting the right connections constituted less than 4% of the responses.

Among Nigerian subjects older students, 16-18 years of age, were significantly more likely than other subjects to say that a poor person could get rich through hard work $F(3,63=15.38)$. The oldest subjects were also significantly more likely to say that personal effort was the key to becoming rich $F(3,64=9.20)$. The oldest subjects were also significantly more likely to say they didn't know how a poor person could get to be rich $F(3,64=13.83)$. Investment as a means to wealth $F(3,64=6.15)$, violating the law $F(3,64=2.52)$ and luck $F(3,64=3.43)$ were cited significantly often. Education and having the right connections were not mentioned by any respondent as a way to get rich.

10. What would have to happen so that there would be no more poor people?

Responses to this question were diverse among U. S. subjects. No significant trends were noted. Responses referring to getting rid of people, denying it is possible, resistance to change, and changing values constituted less than 4% of the total.

Nigerian subjects between 9 and 18 were significantly more likely than younger subjects to say that the rich would have to give away their money to the poor in order to eliminate poverty $F(3,64=5.81)$. Younger children between 6 and 12 were more likely than older children to talk about equity $F(3,64=5.68)$ and change in the social structure $F(3,64=12.51)$.

11. How could you get rich someday?

Personal effort was significantly cited by U. S. respondents $F(3,110=5.69)$ in a pattern whereby the youngest children, ages 6-8, cited effort, this dropped off between 9 and 12, and increased strongly again after age 12. Among Nigerian subjects older students, ages 16-18, were significantly more likely to mention work $F(3,64=2.16)$ and effort $F(3,64=4.24)$ as means to getting rich. Subjects between 9 and 12 years of age were significantly most likely to say they did not want to be rich $F(3,64=3.29)$. Luck was also significantly most likely to be cited by 9-12 year olds as a way to get rich $F(3,64=5.06)$. Effort was increasing cited as a means to get rich as socioeconomic status decreased, with working class subjects mentioning it significantly more often $F(3,64=3.12)$. Work, education, and effort were most often mentioned by subjects, 15-18% each of the responses. Thirty percent of the respondents said they did not know how they could get rich some day with younger Nigerian children significantly more likely to say they didn't know $F(3,64=7.30)$.

12. Are you rich, poor or in the middle?

No significant differences among responses by U. S. subjects were found with this question. There was a trend for younger children to identify themselves as rich (ages 6-8) while older children (ages 9-18) tended to identify themselves as neither rich nor poor but in the middle. A few lower class children described themselves as sometimes rich and sometimes poor.

The youngest Nigerian subjects, ages 6-8, identified themselves significantly more often as either rich $F(3,64=5.88)$ or poor $F(3,64=3.44)$. Thirty-two percent of the Nigerian subjects identified themselves as rich, 57% as poor, and 11% as in the middle.

Conclusions

The results of the study demonstrate that, overall, age appears to be a dominant factor in the study. Sex did not appear to impact on the development of a conception of economic inequality. Socioeconomic status had an effect on the subject's responses to some questions either alone or when it was interacting with age.

The conclusions of this study are organized with respect to the five research questions. The results are viewed from the perspective of the three theoretical systems from which guidelines for the study were derived: cognitive developmental, functionalist, and conflict.

Defining Classes

Central characteristics were most used in defining classes of persons. The use of central characteristics in describing the rich increased in use with age. In describing the poor there was also an increase with age

among U. S. subjects but a decrease among Nigerians. Sociocentric responses were also evident in describing the rich. Peripheral responses were evident among Americans in describing the poor and among Nigerians in describing the rich. The results of this study differed from Leahy's (1981) study in that the description and comparison of the rich using peripheral characteristics did not show a substantial decrease with age. Rural students generally do not experience the stratification of housing by socioeconomic class which exists in metropolitan areas. It is likely that these subjects will be more familiar with the residences, clothing, and other outward characteristics of both rich and poor peers than students living in a metropolitan area would be. In Nigeria dress is important socially. Both men and women wear laces and other expensive fabrics if they can afford them. Nigerian children are likely to notice characteristics such as the expensive fabrics worn by the rich.

The use of central characteristics in describing the rich and poor increased between ages 6 and 18 in both groups. Descriptions of the poor using central responses increased with American and decreased wtih Nigerian subjects. In describing the poor, personal traits were frequently mentioned by Americans while their mention declined with age among Nigerians. Leahy (1981) found class effects with upper-middle-class subjects more likely than subjects from other classes to mention traits of the poor. He also found that lower-and working-class subjects were more likely to mention life chances and thoughts in reference to both the rich and the poor. Socioeconomic status effects were not evident in this study. The difference in results may be due to these students greater likelihood of interacting with students from all classes at school and in other daily activities. Because schools and other institutions are small and personal interaction between subjects more likely, descriptions may focus on individual traits. The Nigerian sample's reference to central characteristics in regard to the poor, however, decreased. Since the sample had no representation of lower class, or poor, people these students may not have much contact with them in school. Their friendships may be formed with other students and may grow to exclude poorer students. As a result they may be less able to ascertain an individual's central characteristics or to identify an individual by them.

Sociological Dimensions

Leahy (1981) found that descriptions and comparisons of the rich and the poor were generally unrelated to sociological dimensions of social class. In this study sociocentric descriptions of the rich increased between ages

6 and 18 while these responses in relation to the poor remained stable among Americans and decreased among Nigerians. References to the rich indicating class consciousness among Americans increased with age but this was not true with references to the poor. Nigerians made few references indicating class consciousness. Since more American subjects were identified as working-or lower-class than middle class in this study it could be that, as they matured, these students became more aware of the differences of the wealthier students from the greater number of lower-income students. This greater awareness could be translated into a personal identification with the poor. It has been suggested that adolescence is a period of increased awareness of the relevance of the social system in one's life (Adelson & O'Neill, 1966; Kohlberg, 1969; Selman, 1976; Leahy, 1981). A gradual change was seen with age in this study suggesting that the change may be cognitive developmental relating to maturing of intellectual structures and not associated with social and other developments restricted to adolescence. Since this effect was not found among Nigerian students it may be due to the fact that no lower class students were in the sample. It may also be due to the fact that Nigeria has been a rapidly developing nation. Such a nation may have blurred class lines in which individuals may rapidly become wealthy no matter what their origins. It may also mean that extended families may contain a wide range of economic levels which results in less of a sense of class isolation. Finally, it is not unusual in Nigeria for a wealthy member of a family to pay school tuition and in other ways help out poorer members, with the result that class lines may again be blurred.

Similarities and Differences

Responses varied when differences and similarities of the rich and poor were considered. Central responses were more consistently used in describing differences. Rich and poor people's thoughts were considered different. This was particularly evident among Americans as the age of the subject increased and the socioeconomic status decreased. Responses relating to similarities were diverse showing no consistent trends among Americans while Nigerians thought they exhibited the same behaviors. Younger Nigerian students often responded in one of two opposing answers saying either they are the same because they are both people or denying any similarity. These results differed somewhat from Leahy's (1981) who found sociocentric responses also increasing with age and peripheral responses showing a curvilinear trend increasing through age 11 and decreasing afterwards. The increasing reference with age to central characteristics in describing differences does suggest

cognitive developmental effects. The diversity of responses in describing similarities among Americans may relate to the percentage of lower-and working-class American students in this study. If they perceive themselves as poor or as having much in common with the poor then they may have difficulty in consistently describing similarities they have with the rich. Nigerian students more frequently responded that the rich and poor have the same behaviors. Since Nigerian rural children often live in villages and travel to their farm they have close contact with people of all classes. Therefore, they may reason that class does not create differences in behavior. In contrast to the American sample, the Nigerian sample tends to be of higher socioeconomic status. Yet, in villages they tend to live close together and have more contact with people from all classes.

The results relating to the first three research questions do not indicate that dialectical or conflict models of class awareness emphasizing class conflict are descriptive of these subjects. While class consciousness in reference to descriptions of the rich did increase with age among American subjects, no difference was evident with socioeconomic status. Nigerian students rarely referred to class consciousness. Nor did lower-or working-class subjects emphasize the life chances of the rich or poor. Also class consciousness was used by American subjects in describing the rich more than in describing the poor (23% vs 3%). These results are consistent with Leahy's (1981) findings.

Theoretical Implications of the First Three Research Questions

The results relating to the first three research questions indicate that a cognitive developmental model may account for many of the findings. Sex and class appeared to have minimal impact on these results. Age showed the most consistent effect. The results are not as broad as those found by Leahy. Fewer differences were found among the subjects. Sociocentric and peripheral responses did show some increase with age suggesting an increasing awareness of the complexity of the social system. However, central responses also showed an increase which did not occur in Leahy's study. It is possible that the more frequent interaction of these subjects with students from other classes and the greater mixing of housing areas resulted in the greater reference to central characteristics.

A second model which can be used to explain the results and which can be complimentary to the cognitive developmental model is the general functionalist model of socialization. This model suggests that socializaiton results in considerable uniformity among classes as to the

nature of the social class system. This uniformity encourages stability in social institutions while delineating the rationale for unequal economic distribution within society. The uniformity among classes apparent in most descriptions in this study lends support to the functionalist model.

Among both American and Nigerian subjects age is the major factor affecting responses, lending cross-cultural support to the impact of cognitive developmental theory. The lack of differences among classes also lends cross-cultural support to the impact of functionalist theory. No cross-cultural support is evident for conflict theory. While there is similarity in support for the theories across both groups, there are differences in specific responses given. Nigerian peripheral responses in describing the rich show an increase with age, especially among the oldest subjects while they decrease among Americans. Conspicuous consumption has been evident among wealthy Nigerians in recent decades so that fine clothes, expensive cars, and multiple wives are the mark of a rich person. As children mature these differences may be more noticeable since they live in villages. Adolescents may place more value on the exterior signs of wealth than younger children do and may be aware of them as they begin to earn their own livings and try to obtain the signs of wealth that are closely at hand in villages. Nigerian descriptions of similarities of the rich and poor are less varied than among Americans again probably because of village life and opportunities to have close daily contact with people from all classes.

Equity Concepts

A response which explained wealth by using definitional criteria ("some people are rich because they have a lot of money") was given most frequently by American subjects as age increased and socioeconomic status decreased. Nigerian subjects did not use definitional criteria, however. Older American subjects were also more likely to refer to inheritance as a reason for being rich while Nigerian subjects did not often refer to inheritance. Younger American children were more likely to be unable to explain why some people are rich and some poor with this response disappearing as they matured while Nigerian children usually gave an explanation. Nigerian children most often cited work and effort as reasons why people were rich, particularly as their class status rose while American students did not as consistently cite work and effort. Effort was seen as a personal means of increasing wealth by younger American children and later adolescents. These subjects did not consistently use similar explanations justifying

inequalities of wealth and poverty. Some effects were evident with socioeconomic status but these were scattered.

These responses do not suggest a clear trend of increasing use of equity concepts in explaining and justifying economic inequality. In general, American subjects seemed unable to explain or justify inequalities consistently. Adolescents did make greater attempts to explain and justify inequalities than did younger children. Nigerian subjects did refer to work and effort more consistently and were more likely to use equity concepts. It may be that in a developing and changing society, an individual who works hard and puts forth strong effort can become wealthy more easily than in a developed society. It may also be that in rural Nigerian society those who work consistently and put in greater effort are more readily rewarded financially than in the U.S.

Social Structure

A clear trend in increasing emphasis on conceptions of social structure was not found with age. These subjects did not refer frequently to social structure. Their responses tended to focus on personal effort, inheritance, and other individualized factors rather than on social structure or changes in that structure which could contribute to greater economic equality. Both American and Nigerian students cited personal factors most frequently and did not often refer to the social structure. Rural society may foster self-reliance and a belief in personal effort and factors which are personalized such as inheritance. It may be that rural children live in more stable conditions than do urban children. They may not see change as happening as quickly as do urban children. Because of slower change and the direct effects of personal labor as is evident on farms, they may not view a change in social structure as either possible or as preferable. In terms of their place in the social structure, U. S. students identification of the clas they lived in was mixed, as was their status as determined by the study. Nigerian students, however, were more likely to identify themselves as poor whereas most had been ranked as upper-upper-middle and middle class. These students appeared to define "rich" as having many more marks of wealth than they themselves had.

Theoretical Implications of the Fourth and Fifth Research Questions

The data support the cognitive developmental model somewhat. Age trends are obvious and show some increase in maturity of thinking. However, since clear trends are not evident there is limited support for this model. Leahy (1983) found ambiguous support for the cognitive developmental model because of complex results without

evident strong trends. This study's findings are similar to Leahy's but are more diverse than his.

Functionalist theory suggests that with increasing age and socialization to the society's rationale of stratification, allegiance to the justification of inequality increases. Because of the lack of consistent response patterns this model does not have strong support. However, since the subjects do not suggest changing the social structure the model receives tacit support. Leahy (1983) also found ambiguous support for the functionalist model. This study's findings, however, may be more supportive of the model than Leahy's.

Dialectical theories focusing on the conflicting perspectives of social groups were not supported by the findings of this study. Class differences, for the most part, were not manifested with increasing age. This finding concurs with Leahy's (1983) finding of few class differences in explanations and justifications of economic inequality.

The findings of this study agree with and differ from Leahy's (1981, 1983) findings to some extent. There is evidence for an age effect among both metropolitan and rural students. The age effect seems to reflect increasing cognitive development. Therefore, a cognitive developmental model has the best, albeit limited, support from these studies.

Limitations

This study has limitations which affect interpretation of its findings. While the sample was a relatively large one to be used in a study whose methodology focused on interviews, a larger sample would have given better representation to sexes, ages, classes and races. The Nigerian sample is particularly limited because no lower class and few working class individuals were represented. Class differences exist between the samples, with the U. S. sample having heavier representation from lower and working classes and the Nigerian sample heavily representing the upper-upper-middle and middle classes.

The interview method itself did allow for a divergence of responses but may have also limited them because the subjects may have wanted to impart views they thought were socially desirable. Because the vocabulary inherent in discussions of society, social classes, socioeconomic status, economic systems and related concepts is not common among most children, many concepts may not be verbalized in interviews even though children have a conception of them. A more structured interview, combined with stories which children can react to and evaluate might elicit conceptions which children find difficult to verbalize. Finally, research in this area needs to be completed with children

representing additional cultures and other samples within the cultures already represented.

Curriculum Implications

The findings of this study and of Leahy's study indicate that social studies educators have not provided sufficient opportunities for children and adolescents to work with the concept of economic inequality. The lack of consistency in responses suggests that there may be many facets which students have never considered. Students may also need opportunities to think through and verbalize their conceptions.

Although more research investigating the development of the conception of economic inequality needs to be carried out, some curriculum implications can be tentatively presented. It would appear that elementary school children are capable of discussing characteristics of the rich and the poor. Such discussion should encourage children to consider peripheral, central and sociocentric characteristics. Similarities and differences should also be discussed at the elementary school level. Finally, social mobility should be considered by children in the upper elementary grades.

Junior and senior high students need to discuss characteristics and similarities and differences between the rich, the poor and those in the middle. These students should be encouraged to consider central and sociocentric characteristics. Social mobility and the rationale for current social stratification and the economic inequality it represents ought also to be considered. Students should think about avenues for social mobility open to members of different classes. For example, crime may seem to be a quick avenue to increased wealth for students from neighborhoods where drug dealers seem to be wealthy while everyone else is poor. Working class students may talk about winning a lottery or becoming a professional basketball star. These and other avenues to wealth should be discussed in terms of positive and negative aspects and the likelihood of each in producing success and wealth (for example, "What percentage of high school basketball players can be expected to become professional players?") Functionalist and dialectical theories of social systems can be explored once students have explored social mobility using concrete examples.

The social studies program prepares students to live in a democratic society. Students cannot be active, responsible members of a democratic society if they cannot describe the inequalities existing in their society, explain why they think those inequalities are there, and suggest how the society should cope with those inequalities.

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